

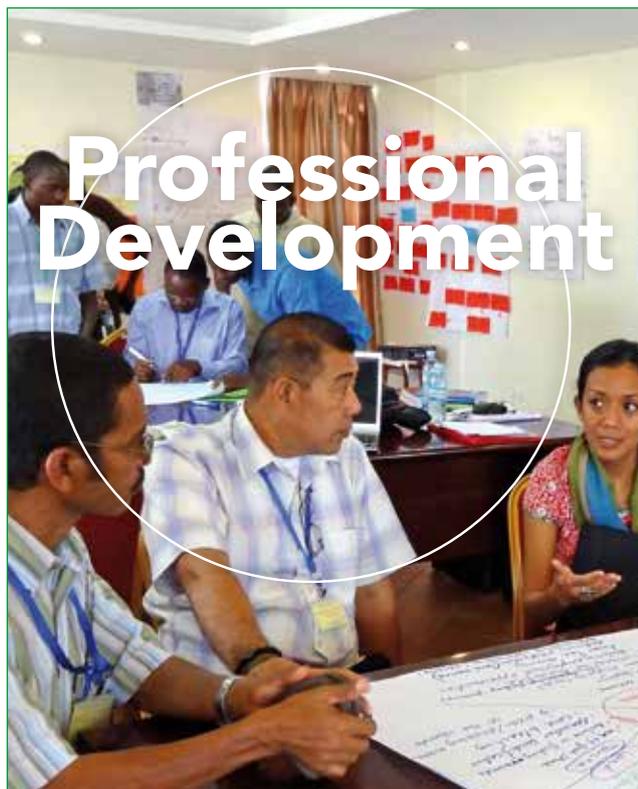
FARMING

MATTERS



Family farming: a way of life

- Ten qualities of family farming ■ New peasants in Spain
- When family farmers lead development



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CALL FOR ARTICLES

Family farmers breaking out of poverty

“Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice.”
– Nelson Mandela

In the International Year of Family Farming we are confronted with a shameful paradox. Family farmers produce more than half of the world’s food. That is a reason to celebrate family farming. Yet, 70% of the world’s most impoverished people live in rural areas and belong to family farming or pastoralist communities. How is this possible? And how can this situation be changed? We seek your groundbreaking views, your innovative proposals and experiences that show how family farmers can break out of the poverty trap and increase their resilience.

Some countries are experiencing strong economic growth, even as food and nutrition insecurity increase. Conflicts over resources (land, water, and biodiversity) and degraded resource bases often threaten the poor and the marginalised who are directly dependent on these resources. Poverty is not just about a lack of money. It has as much to do with people’s asset base in a much broader sense, and thus with power. Poverty is also about people’s capability to deal with situations of shock or

stress – whether social, economic, political or physical. Poor people lack the *resilience* to effectively cope with these shocks. Over the last decade climate change has added to these problems, resulting in ever growing *resilience deficits* in rural communities.

How can poor people in rural areas break out of this vicious cycle? In the June 2014 issue of *Farming Matters* we will focus on how agro-ecological approaches strengthen the resilience of family farmers and help them break out of poverty. We will look at how agro-ecological farming practices and the social dimensions of family farming contribute to strengthening resilience and sustainable resource management. In so doing we examine the roles of young people and women and how policymakers, organisations and researchers can actively encourage the effective and widespread use of agro-ecological approaches as a way to address rural poverty. We welcome your contributions, with supporting evidence.

Articles for the June 2014 issue of *Farming Matters* should be sent to the editors before April 1st, 2013.
E-mail: info@farmingmatters.org



Advocate for sovereign seed systems

My husband and I are trying to go “against the grain” of industrial agriculture in the United States, through our family farm and by presenting to other farmers the importance of saving seed.

We own a biodynamic farm called Against the Grain. In addition to producing a variety of vegetables and grains, we raise chickens, dairy goats, and make products like sorghum molasses and cornmeal. Over the last few years, we have saved and produced seed as an additional income stream. Like many family farmers in the US who farm full-time, my husband and I both have second jobs.

I am passionate about sharing the importance of saving seed. Frequently, I present to other farmers and groups about the monopolisation of the seed industry and growing seed as a source

of income. Recently I presented at the Young Farmers Conference in New York, and this winter, I am invited for a farmer entrepreneur series at our local co-operative extension. Through these presentations, we are hoping to expand the network of farmers who are saving seeds and regaining sovereignty over their seeds.

Everyone eats and therefore everyone relies upon safe, sovereign sources of seed. It is absolutely essential that farmers have access to seed stock that is sovereign. The more small farms that choose to engage in skillful and knowledgeable seed saving, the safer and more secure our food system becomes.

Holly Whitesides and her husband Andy live in Boone, North Carolina. Read more about Holly and Andy: www.atgfarm.com Photo: Jessica Kennedy

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The mother of our breath

Palauan traditional farming shows how agriculture, family values and culture are interconnected. Facing challenges, family farmers selectively adopt and adapt new approaches while trying to maintain their values. To strengthen their voice and their position, the small-scale family farms of these islands are collectively standing up for their rights and calling for support to maintain important (agri)cultural customs.



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“We are a political and economic force”

In countries where big businesses receive favourable treatment, peasants, indigenous peoples and pastoralists fight for their survival. Deo Sumaj, one of the leaders of the Peasant Movement of Santiago del Estero Via Campesina in Argentina, talks about this struggle against threats such as land grabbing, and about ways the peasant movement builds food sovereignty.



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From conflicts to profitable alliances

In the North-West Region of Cameroon, conflicts have been increasing between sedentary family farmers and pastoral communities as pressure on the available land increases. Farmer-pastoralist alliances are helping to resolve the conflicts by transforming the relationships between these families. By engaging in dialogue, both groups can benefit from synergies between their different farming systems.

Jorge Chavez-Tafur is leaving ILEIA

After having worked with us for eight years, our editor-in-chief Jorge Chavez-Tafur is leaving ILEIA. We greatly appreciate his dedication and knowledge that have helped *Farming Matters* become the magazine it is today. He has also been a key person in developing ILEIA's documentation work. We will definitely miss him, a dedicated and gifted editor and documentation trainer, much appreciated by his readers and trainees. We wish him lots of success and happiness in his future work. Thank you Jorge!



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The year 2014 has been proclaimed by the UN as the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF). As several articles in this issue of *Farming Matters* point out, it makes a great deal of sense to strengthen family farming. Yet there are powerful forces pulling agriculture into a very different direction, as can be seen in the focus on agribusiness in rural policy and practice.

Speaking at a recent conference in Dakar, our colleague Paulo Petersen from Brazil noted that the key to sustainable agriculture is farmer autonomy. To achieve this, he added, “we need to create political space for multifunctional peasant farming and build social and ecological resilience.” We hope that this issue will help our readers to appreciate the strong link between family farming and resilience, and between the family and their farm.

In contrast to what many believe, family farming is not outside, but part of the global economy. However, it relates to it in a different manner than other types of agriculture. In more and more places, young family farmers are discovering a future in agriculture by working with, rather than against, nature. Family farmers also connect with urban consumers, building new local and regional food systems that are transparent, healthy, fair, efficient and sustainable.

Throughout 2014, *Farming Matters* will highlight different aspects of family farming: agrobiodiversity, resilience, landscapes and nutrition. A common thread running through all these themes is gender. Men and women play different, but complementary, roles and strengthen the farm as a multifunctional system. But sometimes their roles can clash. This can happen when farmers move to more entrepreneurial modes of farming with a focus on specific cash crops and value chains. This may have negative implications for women’s autonomy with respect to food production, and for food security at the household level. Many studies have shown that more income for the head of the family does not automatically turn into more nutritious food for the family. It may even lead to the reverse. Therefore, women need to be centre stage in the IYFF, and in decision-making on the future of our global food system.

Edith van Walsum

Edith van Walsum, director ILEIA

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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Help us improve *Farming Matters* and the way we reach you by completing our readers' survey.

Please go to extra.agriculturesnetwork.org/survey
The survey will be accessible until February 10th, 2014

IYFF-2014 PHOTO COMPETITION

Visualising the potential and contributions of family farmers worldwide

The International Year of Family Farming (IYFF) highlights the decisive role of family farming in the sustainable production of 80% of the world's food and in the conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity.

SEND US YOUR BEST PHOTOS

The IYFF-2014 photo competition is calling for photos that represent the motto:

**Family Farming:
Feeding the world, caring for the earth.**

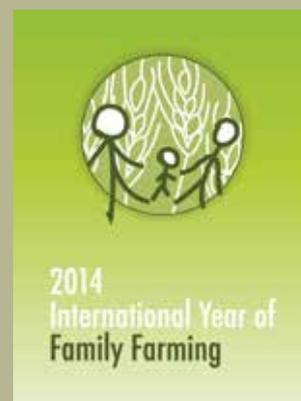
Entries should depict the strength, potential and challenges of sustainable, multifunctional, family farmers worldwide, in all their diversity and contexts.

The photo competition is open to everyone. We particularly encourage farmers, women,

and young people to participate. A high profile jury composed of renowned artists and farmers will select the best photos. Winners will be announced in October 2014 and receive a small cash prize.

The deadline for entries is May 1st, 2014.
Read more and submit your photos at
www.agriculturesnetwork.org/photocompetition

The IYFF-2014 photo competition is organised by the World Rural Forum and the AgriCultures Network, in close collaboration with the Asian Farmers Association, CLOC-La Via Campesina and the More and Better Network.



Farming Matters welcomes comments, ideas and suggestions from its readers. Please contact us via e-mail at info@farmingmatters.org or write to P.O Box 90, 6700 AB Wageningen, the Netherlands.



Social Learning

Innovation fairs, such as the one described in the article by Ann Waters-Bayer in the previous issue of *Farming Matters*, are worthwhile initiatives that justify the effort of organising them. They give a broader exposure to the creativity of farmers, an exposure that extends beyond the farm or community level. They also provide a platform for other farmers, researchers and academia to interact with innovative farmers. They should be the launching pad for national and even regional agricultural research in which researchers and academics could further refine farmers' innovations and help disseminate these ideas for adoption and adaptation. Farmer innovations are tried and tested over time under local conditions. They are most appropriate for addressing local or national agriculture challenges and they really do broaden social learning.

Rose Aduol, a comment on www.agriculturesnetwork.org

Inspirational farmers

India's subsistence farming system – along with its environmental, economical, social and health benefits – has almost been blown away by the winds of “progress”. But during our fieldwork in one of the semi-arid regions of Tamil Nadu, we met a women farmer, Navaneetham, whose family provides a perfect example of family farming: her brothers, sister-in-laws, mother, grandchildren and friends are all part of her farm. She cultivates a range of crops, which she says help her to meet all her family needs and secure her live-

lihood. In addition to food crops, they cultivate jasmine flowers, for which there is a huge local demand. We hope that the International Year of Family Farming means that we shall see more farmers like Navaneetham in our region!

Dhanya Praveen, A. Ramachandran, P. Radhapriya and P.Thirumurugan, Researchers, Anna University, Chennai, India

Time to stop “capacity-building”?

In the late-1980s we were pioneers in the field of “participatory development” and “capacity-building”. The outcomes were sometimes life-changing. Today most practitioners find themselves wrapped up in an operational straightjacket that greatly constrains their creativity – which is central to grassroots learning. Conventional capacity building tends to perpetuate the unwanted features of top-down extension: externally conceived, pre-planned, expert-led. We decided to become farmers and we have noticed that many former development professionals have initiated exciting projects of their own – for example, organic co-operatives and restaurants or recycling initiatives – that serve as platforms for social change. We believe that ultimately, change happens through practice. We and our former colleagues continue to work in these fields, but without external funding, project deadlines and logframes. We now work as producers and consumers, as farmers and urbanites, mums and dads as well as neighbours. Therefore, we have a question for the readers of

Farming Matters: is it time to stop worrying about capacity-building and start investing in simply *being*? *This contribution has been shortened: read it in full and share your thoughts on www.agriculturesnetwork.org/dev30*

Myriam Paredes (the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), Ecuador) and Stephen Sherwood (Wageningen University, the Netherlands) own a family-run organic farm in Ecuador.

Education for family farming

Family farmers can make a large contribution to increasing food production and enhancing sustainability. And yet, conventional agricultural education pays very little attention to sustainable family farming, the way it works, or its potential. There is a huge gap between the daily realities of hundreds of millions of family farmers and what is being taught to agricultural students around the world. For instance, when parents encourage their daughters to become educated and leave farming behind this clearly signals a move away from family farming. Many of these people hope that the family farm will remain, yet they realise that circumstances beyond their control require that they make some changes. The need for income from the wife's off-farm activities often leads farm families to adapt their attitudes and farm management.

Mohammadreza Davari, Researcher, Kimiyayeh Sabz (Green alchemy) NGO (www.ksngo.org), Iran

Ten qualities of family farming

Even in the International Year of Family Farming there is confusion about family farming. What is it, and what distinguishes it from entrepreneurial farming or family agribusiness? The confusion tends to be highest in places where the modernisation of agriculture has led society further away from farming. Jan Douwe van der Ploeg takes us into the world of family farming, which he says is considered to be “both archaic and anarchic, and attractive and seductive”.

Jan Douwe van der Ploeg

What is family farming? For many reasons, family farming is one of those phenomena that Western societies find increasingly difficult to understand. One of these reasons is that family farming is at odds with the bureaucratic logic, formalised protocols and industrial rationale that increasingly dominate our societies. This makes family farming into something that is seen, on the one hand, as archaic and anarchic, whilst at the same time it emerges as something attractive and seductive.

Family farming is also difficult to grasp because it is a complex, multi-layered and multi-dimensional phenomenon. Below, I identify ten qualities of family farming. These qualities are not always present at the same time in every situation. The most important thing to remember is that the reality of family farms is far richer than the two single aspects that are most commonly used to describe them: that the farm is owned by the family and that the work is done by the family members.

Family farming is not just about the size of the farm, as when we talk about small scale farming; it is more about the way people farm and live. This is why family farming is *a way of life*.

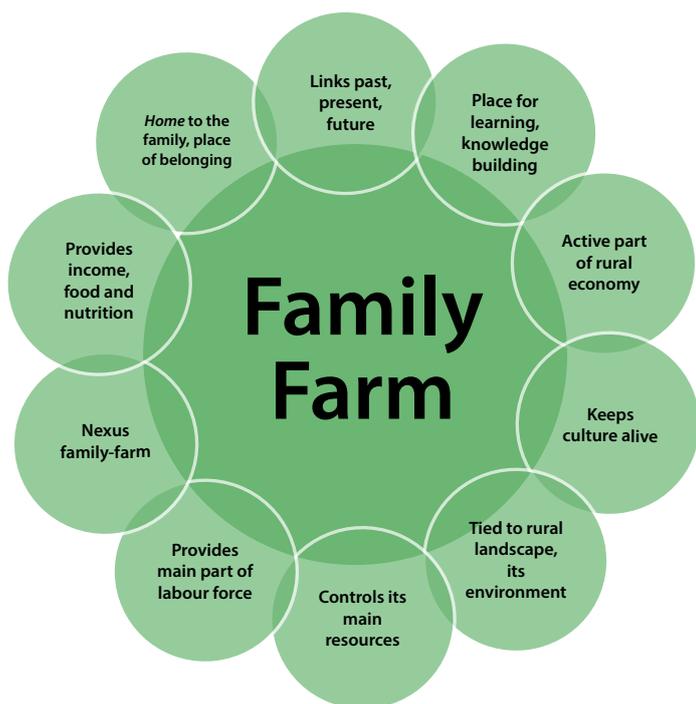
A balance of farm and family

Let's take a look at these ten qualities. First, **the farming family has control over the main resources (1)** that are used in the farm. This includes the land, but also the animals, the crops, the genetic material,



Bas, Henk and Corneel van Rijn, 5th and 6th generation farmers in the Netherlands (www.boerderijbuitenverwachting.nl).

Photo: Bob van der Vlist



the house, buildings, machinery and, in a more general sense, the know-how that specifies how these resources need to be utilised and combined. Access to networks and markets, as well as co-ownership of co-operatives, are also important resources.

Family farmers use these resources not to make a profit, but to make a living; to acquire an income that provides them with a decent life and, if possible, allows them to make investments that will further develop the farm.

In addition the family farm is a place where the **family provides the main part of the labour force** (2). This makes the farm into a place of self-employment and of progress for the family. It is through their dedication, passion and hard work that the farm is further developed and that the livelihood of the family is improved.

The farm is there to meet the many needs of the family, whilst the family provides the possibilities, the means and also the limitations for the farm. This **nexus between the family and the farm** (3) is at the core of many decisions about the development of the farm. Each particular farm has its own specific balances, for instance between the mouths to be fed and the hands to do the work. These balances tie family and farm together and make each family farm into a unique constellation.

Linking past, present and future But there is more than ownership and labour. **Family farms provide the farming family with a part (or all) of its income and food** (4). Having

control over the quality of self-produced food (and being confident that it is not contaminated) is becoming increasingly important for farmers around the world – something that DeoSumaj highlights on page 16. However, **the family farm is not only a place of production** (5). It is also home to the farming family. It is the place they belong to, as much as the place that gives them shelter. It is the place where the family lives and where children grow up.

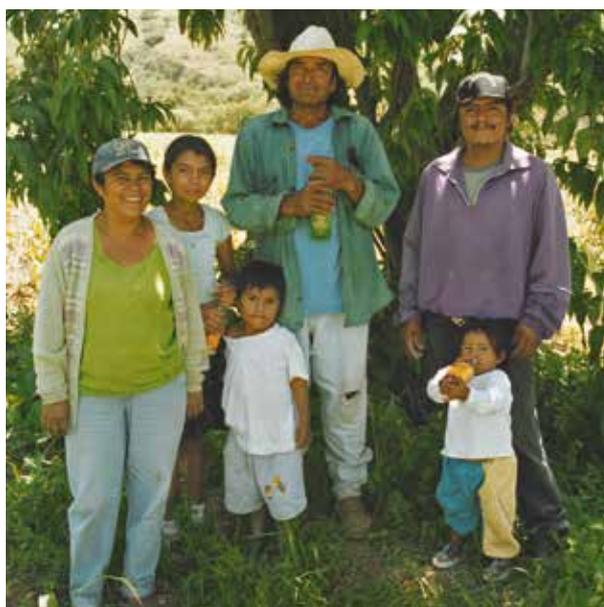
The farming family is part of a flow that links past, present and future (6). This means that every farm has a history and is full of memories. It also means that the parents are working for their children. They want to give the next generation a solid starting point whether within, or outside, agriculture. And since the farm is the outcome of the work and dedication of this and previous generations, there is often pride. And there can also be anger if others try to damage or even destroy the jointly constructed farm.

The family farm is the place where experience accumulates (7), learning takes place and knowledge is passed on, in a subtle but strong way, to the next generation (see the article by Robert Bishop, p. 12). The family farm often is a node in wider networks in which new insights, practices, seeds, etc., circulate.

Tied to its environment The family farm is not just an economic enterprise that focuses mainly, or only, on profits, but a place where continuity and culture are important. The farming family is part of a wider rural community, and sometimes part of networks that extend into cities. As such, **the family**

The family farm links past, present and future.

Photo: Badstue / LEISA Archive





Family farmers are responsible for the production of 70% of the world's food. Photo: Alessandra Benedetti (FAO)

farm is a place where culture is applied and preserved (8), just as the farm can be a place of cultural heritage.

The family and the farm are also part of the wider rural economy (9), they are tied to the locality, carrying the cultural codes of the local community. Thus, family farms can strengthen the local rural economy: it is where people buy, spend and engage in other activities.

Similarly, the family farm is part of a wider rural landscape (10). It may work with, rather than against nature, using ecological processes and balances instead of disrupting them, thus preserving the beauty and integrity of landscapes. When family farmers works with nature, they also contribute to conserving biodiversity as we see in Andhra Pradesh (p. 22) and to fighting global warming. The work implies an ongoing interaction with living nature – a feature that is highly valued by the actors themselves.

Freedom and autonomy The family farm is an institution that is attractive as it allows the farm family a relative degree of autonomy. It embodies a “double freedom”: there is *freedom from* direct external exploitation and there is *freedom to* do things in your own way.

In short, family farming represents a direct unity of manual and mental labour, of work and life, and of production and development. It is an institution that can continue to produce in an adverse capitalist environment, just as anaerobic bacteria are able to survive in an environment without oxygen (I am grateful to Raúl Paz from Argentina who coined this nice metaphor).

Why is it important? Family farming carries the promise of creating agricultural practices that are highly productive, sustainable, receptive, responsive, innovative and dynamic. Given all these features, family farming can make a strong contribution to food security and food sovereignty. It can strengthen economic development in a variety of ways, creating employment and generating income. It strengthens the economic, ecological and social resilience of rural communities. It offers attractive jobs to large parts of society and can contribute considerably to the emancipation of downtrodden groups in society. Family farming can also consistently contribute to the maintenance of beautiful landscapes and biodiversity.

External threats However, it may turn out to be impossible to effectively realise all these promises. This is particularly the case these days, when family farming is being squeezed to the bones and becoming impoverished.

When prices are low, costs are high and volatility makes medium or long term planning impossible, and when access to markets is increasingly blocked and agricultural policies neglect family farmers, and when land and water are increasingly grabbed by large capital groups – in such circumstances it becomes impossible for family farmers to provide positive contributions to society at large.

This is why we have now ended up in the dramatic situation that the land of many family farmers is laying idle. Or, to use a macro indicator, that 70% of the poor in this world today, are rural people.



Family farming is about more than just the size of the farm. Photo: S. Jayaraj

Internal threats There are internal threats as well. Nowadays it is *en vogue* to talk about the “need to make family farming more business-like”, in other words that it should be oriented towards making profits. Some even argue that this is the only way to keep young people in agriculture. According to this view, family farming should become less “peasant-like” and more “entrepreneurial”, and family farming in the global South should be subject to a similar process of modernisation that has occurred in the North.

A part of European agriculture has indeed changed towards entrepreneurial farming. This has effectively turned the family farm into a mere supplier of labour, at the expense of all the other features mentioned

“Family farming represents a direct unity of manual and mental labour, of work and life, and of production and development.”

above. Formally, these entrepreneurial farms are still family farms, but in substance they are quite different. One major difference is that “real” family farms grow and develop through clever management of natural, economic and human resources, and through (inter-generational) learning. Entrepreneurial farms mostly grow through *taking over* other family farms. This tendency to enter into entrepreneurial trajectories is a major internal threat to the continuity and dominance of family farms. And we see it nearly everywhere.

Re-peasantisation However, there are important counter-tendencies. Many family farms are strengthening their position and their income by following agro-ecological principles, by engaging in new activities, or by producing new products and new services – often distributed through new, nested markets. Analytically these new strategies are defined as forms of re-peasantisation. They make farming more peasant-like again, but at the same time they strengthen the family farm, as can be seen in the example of re-peasantisation in Spain (p. 26). Re-peasantisation is way of defending and strengthening family farming.



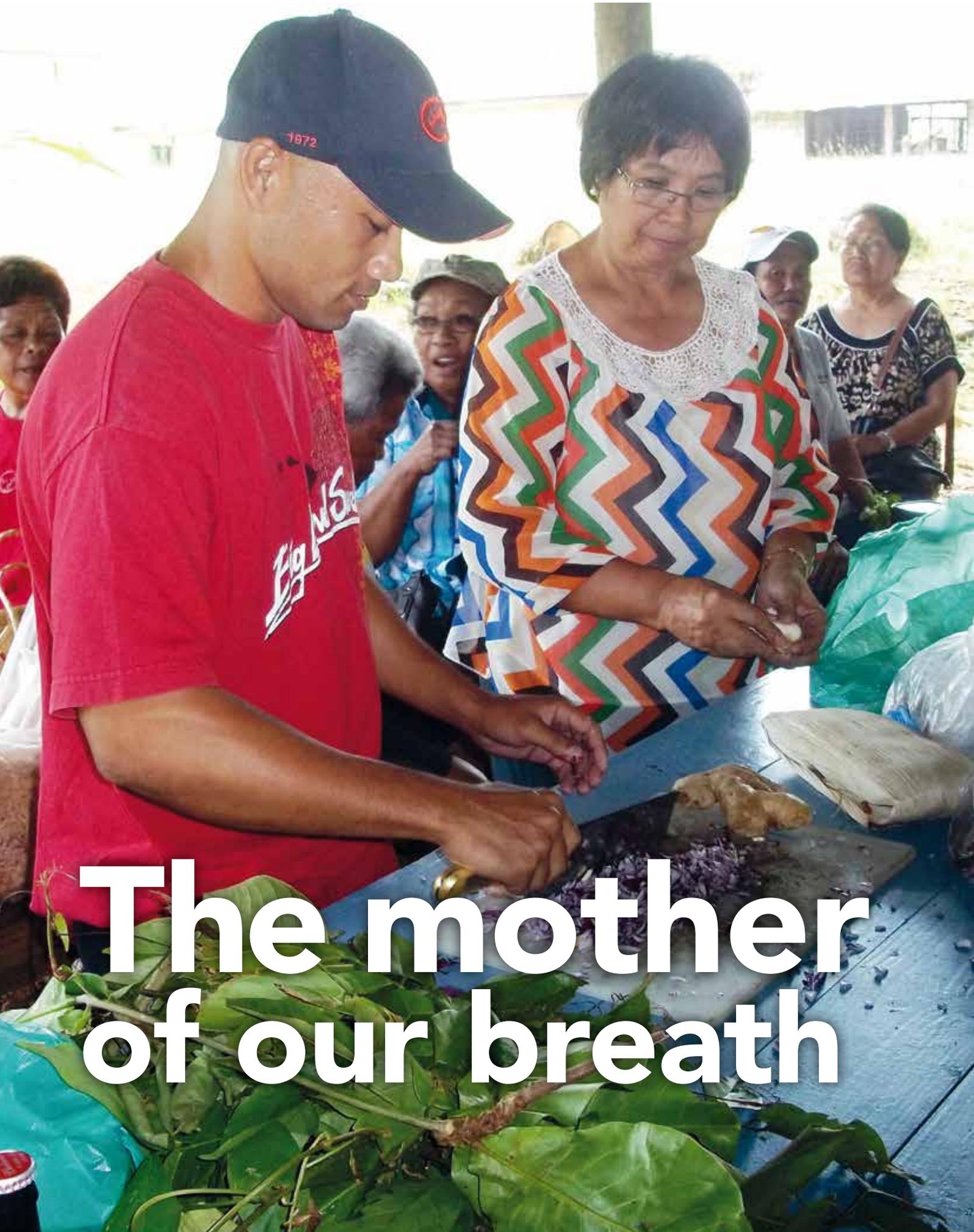
Harvesting potatoes in Huancavelica, Peru.
Photo: Jean-Louis Gonterre (CIP-CGIAR)

What is to be done? The policy environment is extremely important for the fate of family farming. Although family farming can survive in highly adverse conditions, positive conditions can help family farming reach its full potential. This is precisely the reason that the policies of state apparatuses, multinational forums (such as the FAO, IFAD and other UN organisations), but also of political parties, social movements and civil society as a whole, are so important.

Policy can ensure that family farmers’ rights are secured and that sufficient investments are made in infrastructure, research and extension, education, market channels, social security, health and other areas. This provides farmers with the security to invest in their own futures, as recently reconfirmed by the prestigious High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition.

Strengthening rural organisations and movements is also of great importance. We have to keep in mind that, all around the world, family farmers are trying to find and unfold new responses to difficult situations. Thus, identifying successful responses, building on novel practices, communicating them to other places and other family farmers and linking them into dynamic processes of change must be central items on our agenda. In short: much needs to be done. The good news though, is that every step, no matter how small, is helpful.

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**The mother
of our breath**

In the westernmost region of the Caroline Islands of Micronesia lies the Republic of Palau. Palauan traditional farming shows how agriculture, family values and culture are interconnected. Despite these connections, family farms are facing challenges. By joining forces, the small-scale family farms of these islands are standing up for their rights and calling for support for maintaining important (agri)cultural customs.

Robert V. Bishop

Pride, power and income Palauan traditional farms represent a form of agriculture that is strongly family-oriented. In the matrilineal society of Palau, agriculture defines the female sphere of influence and is a source of pride, power, and income for women. The importance of agriculture and women in Palau is illustrated by the Palauan proverb: “The taro patch is the mother of our breath.” In general, women have been the nurturers of the family and providers of food on land, while men have been providers from the sea. Children are expected to help their parents and other elders in their different tasks. Palauan women are referred to as “walking libraries of family food production” – especially in the cultivation of taro, which women have developed and fine-tuned. Female-produced agricultural products together with additional marine and forest products have provided a self-sufficient food system with a built-in safety net against natural and economic disasters, pest intrusion and old age.

In addition to providing food and income, the taro patch serves a number of other purposes in Palauan communities. Exchanging taro and other food plays a role in cultural customs and major family events, such as birth ceremonies and funerals. Family farms are multi-purpose enterprises and this means that they have been buffers at times of disaster and provide a glue for bonding and wealth creation. This “sharing and caring” has had a multiplier effect and actually creates economic and social wealth, even though this wealth creation is not reflected in official statistics. The relationship between farming families and their beneficiaries functions as a “value web”, rather than the often highly touted “value chain”. Every connection in the web is a bond. The goal of each exchange was not profit, but to provide a valued product or service. Family farms in Palau are more than farms owned and operated by families: they are farms with family – rather than corporate – values.

Family farms also act as cultural and social learning centers. Children have learnt about the health-promoting features of plants, about how, when and

where to plant different crops and about the sacredness of food. They also learn about taboos and customs, the core values that empower and enable Palauan culture, birth control, reciprocity, the role of the family and each family member – and much more. As such, the family farm has not only been a way to keep youth engaged in and knowledgeable on agriculture, it has in many ways been the forum for inter-generational communication.

A changing landscape Traditionally, Palau was self-sufficient in food at the household, community, and national levels. By contrast, today imported foods constitute at least 90% of the average household diet. To break this dependency, Palau needs to (re)develop locally produced goods and services. Yet

Traditional taro systems

The predominant agricultural activity in Palau is production for family sustenance: the main crops are taro, cassava, sweet potato, banana and coconut. As in many other parts of Oceania, Palauan traditional agriculture features a multi-story agroforestry system in which trees provide a protective canopy for the intensive production of 40 to 50 plant varieties. An invaluable aspect of this system – culturally, socially and economically – is the taro patch. Patches of taro, the major food staple in Palau, slightly resemble rice paddies, where dykes and pathways encase a wetland. The soil is turned over and enriched with large quantities of green manure. An analysis done in Palau shows that, when comparing the value of production to labour, cash and non-cash inputs into different crops, the taro patch is the most productive system.



“Harvest the taro when it is ripe”: traditional knowledge on disease prevention on a poster.

Photo: Robert Bishop

a political neglect of agriculture and people’s reluctance to buy from multiple small farms, as well as the devaluation of traditional foods, such as taro, have all caused traditional family farming to lose ground.

Although colonial governments have attempted to turn agriculture into a commercial and male-dominated enterprise, agriculture generally remains a “female” vocation in contemporary Palau. At the moment, large commercially oriented farms, traditional farms and “hybrid” farms exist side by side. Most of the large commercial farms are managed by foreigners, using foreign labour, with the profit leaving Palau. In hybrid farms women commonly grow traditional crops for their own consumption and exchange as well as for the market. They increasingly employ male Asian farm workers. Agriculture in Palau appears to be entering a phase where crops are produced for subsistence and for sale in a typical dual-economy mode, but maintaining production of traditional crops is of importance to both social activities and subsistence.

The taro patch ladies and other traditional agriculturists, organic and “natural” farmers, supporters of traditional foods, the “health conscious” and others have expressed concerns about the effects of commercial agriculture on people’s health and the environment. This is not a total rejection of all non-traditional approaches, but rather a very selective adoption and adap-

tation of the elements which are compatible to family values. The changes in Palauan agriculture reflect not a dichotomy between “traditional” versus “modern”, but rather show a difference in orientation: is a farm “profit-oriented” or “family-oriented”? Is it focused on sales, or on services? Elements of commercialism can exist in harmony with traditional values; yet unbridled commercialisation will render the “family” in farming meaningless. Family, culture and agriculture are intrinsically linked. Since the taro patch is “the mother of our breath,” on the day that the last Palauan women goes to the last taro patch for the last time, Palau’s culture will have surely breathed its last breath.

Increased interaction Farmers have joined hands to rescue the valuable contributions of family farming. Some state governments implement programmes incorporating family farming and agro-ecology through favourable leases, trainings and infrastructure development, for instance. In addition, the joint Ministry of Health and private sector initiative “Healthy Foods” is resulting in greater demand for organic, traditional, “natural”, nutritious and safe food. Nonetheless, farmers lament that government programmes, including environmental programmes, marginalise family farming and assign agriculture low among its priorities. Calls to intensify

family farms reveal an ignorance of the reality that most of the farms are already intensified, that all areas of the farm already have a purpose. In most cases there is no way to squeeze in more without resulting in a loss of the many functionalities of the farm.

In contrast to the dominant calls for commercialisation and intensification, farmer organisations have started to implement initiatives to support family farmers. Palau has three main farmer organisations, which fight for the survival of their traditions. At the Palau Taiwan Farmers' Association (PTFA) and the Organisation for Industrial, Spiritual and Cultural Advancement (OISCA), we believe that preservation of traditional forms of agriculture is crucial for the preservation of Palau's culture. The Palau Organic Growers Association (POGA) is looking to "preserve the best and adopt the new". In all three organisations, women hold, or have held, officer positions. PTFA is composed of mostly women, while OISCA and POGA have around 40% and 30% women members respectively.

The organisations supply services and improve access to existing services, including markets and value-adding processes. Educational events and demonstration gardens serve the farmers, but also help link producers to the rest of the community. We are lobbying for support structures that enable interaction between different actors. The organisations help showcase effective farming practices and try to build a strong positive image of family farmers and their products. By promoting traditional dishes through calendars or building farmer-chef alliances, traditional products and family values are popularised within society at large.

Revitalising family farming PTFA is now trying to establish a multi-purpose and multi-functional site called "The Meeting Place". It is anticipated that it will act as type of regional food hub,

offering more than the existing local markets. It will enable family farmers to deal directly with consumers and attract wholesale agents, attract foreign visitors and local consumers, provide a venue for training and building relationships between farmers, chefs and consumers, function as an order-processing and -assembling center, and serve as a cultural reinforcement and magnet.

The Meeting Place can also strengthen capacities to develop strategic action plans for import substitution and linkages to the tourist market. Tourism is the fastest growing economic sector in Palau, but for tourism to be sustainable and sustaining, it needs to be supported by local food production so the tourist dollars are recirculated within Palau. A support mechanism like this can strengthen the value web and enhance recovery efforts after disasters, such as destructive typhoons, as it links producers with areas most in need.

Our experiences in Palau also teach us how traditional practices in family farms can strengthen cultural identity, build solidarity among farms, and assign greater value to traditional ethics. Revitalising and enhancing traditional practices is a learning opportunity that has practical implications for climate change mitigation and building resilience to disasters and crises. Finally, family farming needs to be made more attractive for future generations, using social marketing and the media to counter the ongoing devaluation of family farmers. Rather than framing farming as a last resort for the uneducated and unemployable, we need to promote family farming as a noble vocation.

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A basket weaving demonstration organised by PTFA was the first of a series of monthly market educational activities. Photo: Robert Bishop





“We are a political
and economic
force”

About 23 years ago, in Santiago del Estero, a province in the north of Argentina, the Peasant Movement of Santiago del Estero Via Campesina (MOCASE -VC) was established. One of its leaders is Deo Sumaj, an impressive peasant woman of the Vilela indigenous people. “Peasant family farming could provide many answers to the crises that humanity faces.”

Interview: Teresa Gianella

The Vilela have been breeding livestock and farming in the semi-arid Chaco region of Argentina for centuries. Ever since she was a young girl, Deo Sumaj has been involved in defending her people's resources and land, a struggle which her family have been involved in for four generations. Ms Sumaj is the Secretary of the National Indigenous Peasant Movement, and she also keeps goats and produces honey with other members of her community.

What is happening to family farmers in your region? The global crisis is pushing more and more men and women into extreme poverty. Where I live, we are witnessing it in our daily lives. The Chaco is a fragile ecosystem in which 40% of the land is being desertified and becoming saline due to wind and water erosion. Land grabs and destructive investments by large companies, especially large soy monoculture plantations, contribute to climate change and decimate peasants, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples and pastoralists. Big business has an extremely harmful impact on peasant territories, while making excessive profits. It is not only agribusinesses that are the cause of so much misery, but also extractive industries, real estate speculation and drug trade, all of which affect people in many places – from rural villages to the outskirts of cities such as Buenos Aires.

As a remedy, MOCASE-VC promotes and practices sustainable agriculture and agro-ecological systems. Our organisation is building another model of food production, based on a different logic, another paradigm which we call food sovereignty. We produce food to meet the needs of local communities, while protecting our common heritage: our land, biodiversity, water, native seeds, culture and local history. In our view, food sovereignty is not just an issue for those who work on the land. It is also a fight for everyone who consumes, who eats.

How do you build this new model? MOCASE-VC has started collective production companies, where decisions on work contracts are taken collectively. We have candy factories, a goat milk cheese factory that runs on solar power, and several community butcher shops which are managed and do their distribution and pricing in a completely different way from conventional butchers. These are examples of ways we try to build a just relationship between rural and urban producers and workers. They create employment, contribute to rural development and give consumers and producers an opportunity to relate directly with each other.



Deo Sumaj: "Policies should stimulate a return to the rural areas and production systems around diversified food." Photo: Francesc Puig

We have been able to develop and implement these strategies by ourselves, but this does not mean that we should not be involved in lobbying the government. Today more than ever, agricultural policies are needed that can improve the skills and resources of peasant organisations, training and empowering indigenous family farmers, men, women and the youth. Policies should stimulate a return to the rural areas and production systems around diversified food instead of commodities.

How did MOCASE-VC start?

At the end of the 1990s, we started to organise ourselves to halt the agribusiness-driven evictions of farming families from their land. Through our indigenous peasant family unions, we defended our land and ancestral territories. We gained strength and built solidarity, which is the basis of our movement today.

In 1999 we organised a historic congress "Peasants united in the fight for land and justice". Since then we have taken on board other issues apart from land grabbing. These now cover health, education, production, marketing and communication. We have formed teams around these topics composed of delegates from the various provincial departments. In territories where there was conflict over access to land, we offered possible solutions led by the farmers in those areas.

We realised that it was difficult to organise the native peoples within this province. They were chased from their land many years ago by the timber industry, which led to a loss of cultural identity. In the 1940s, the timber industry withdrew from the province. The families who had worked for these companies, clearing the forests with axes, were left without work and had to survive with nature as their only sustenance.



"Food sovereignty is not just an issue for those who work on the land. It is also a fight for everyone who eats." Photo: Francesc Puig

Even though today their land and production have recovered, the struggle goes on. We are now facing threats and attacks of large companies grabbing peasant land, especially for genetically modified soy.

What role does power play in this struggle? Fundamentally, this fight is unequal. In Argentina, the political and judicial authorities protect the companies more than farmers, who are sometimes criminalised and pursued. Tragically, some members of MOCASE-VC have been murdered by assassins hired by the land grabbing companies, including Cristian Ferreyra (age 23) in November 2011 and Miguel Galvan (age 39) in October 2012. But we have also had some victories. Our protests have managed to halt various planned evictions of peasants from their lands.

There is a large degree of elitism in Argentina – which often translates into racism against indigenous people. This elitism is present in the traditional institutions such as the judiciary and in the opaque notary and land registration systems across the country. It also has to do with feudal characteristics that can still be found in some local authorities in the interior of Argentina.

What are your strategies? Our strategies aim to strengthen our production systems, to rescue and revive ancient knowledge, and to allow the participation of grassroots organisations and peasant families in decision making.

We have also developed a communication strategy. This was much needed, because the communications system of the Chaco region was completely under the control of the former governor and his family. To

break the media monopoly, we have been working with our allies since 2000 to build our own radio network. We have trained indigenous farmer communicators who today are part of six FM radio stations located in different departments of the province.

Another important part of our work is to give political and technical training to indigenous peasant youth. Our agro-ecological schools enable young people to contextualise and practice agro-ecology in the communities. Since 2007 we have been establishing these schools in various municipalities. They have become a permanent training base for young activists – both men and women. Through their studies these young people start to take on responsibility for addressing the inequalities that exist within their localities and establishing links with urban areas. To date around 800 youth have participated in these agro-ecology schools and another 11,750 took part in our summer youth camps.

Our largest school is a university: the Peasant University UNICAM SURI (Indo-Peasant Rural University System). It brings together hundreds of peasants and urban workers around four educational tracks: Agro-ecology and rural development, Human rights and planning, Music and popular culture, and Popular media. UNICAM SURI is recognised and supported by the National Universities of La Plata and Quilmes, the Ministry of Agriculture and many other organisations.

Basically, we view this as a kind of alternative development project that is socially and environmentally sustainable. It keeps our collective food production systems alive, and safeguards their diversity and accessibility.

What do you propose for the IYFF? The challenge of the International Year is to recognise, value and strengthen the role of indigenous peasant family farming, not only in food production but also as a political and economic force in our societies. Humanity is in crisis; we are experiencing climate change, hunger, energy crisis, unemployment, urban migration, pollution and degradation of natural resources. Many of these problems result from the exploitation of natural resources by capitalist agriculture. Peasant family farming could provide many answers to these issues.

The 2014 International Year of Family Farming should be a wake up call to nation states. They need to start to support, promote and encourage the development of farming systems that have been able to feed the world for centuries. Our national, regional and international peasant organisations will continue to mobilise and act in defence of life and the rights of Mother Earth, in pursuit of the good life of today and of our future generations.

Deo Sumaj is one of the jury members in the international family farming photo competition, see page 6.

On the eve of the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF), we congratulate the hundreds of organisations and individuals who are committed to participating in it. All of you are doing a great job of communicating and raising awareness. We hope that the IYFF will give a significant boost to the demands of all family farmers, including peasants, indigenous peoples, traditional fishermen, pastoralists and others. And the signs are hopeful – the preparations for the IYFF are already causing an unprecedented movement of farmer movements, civil society groups, governments and international agencies.

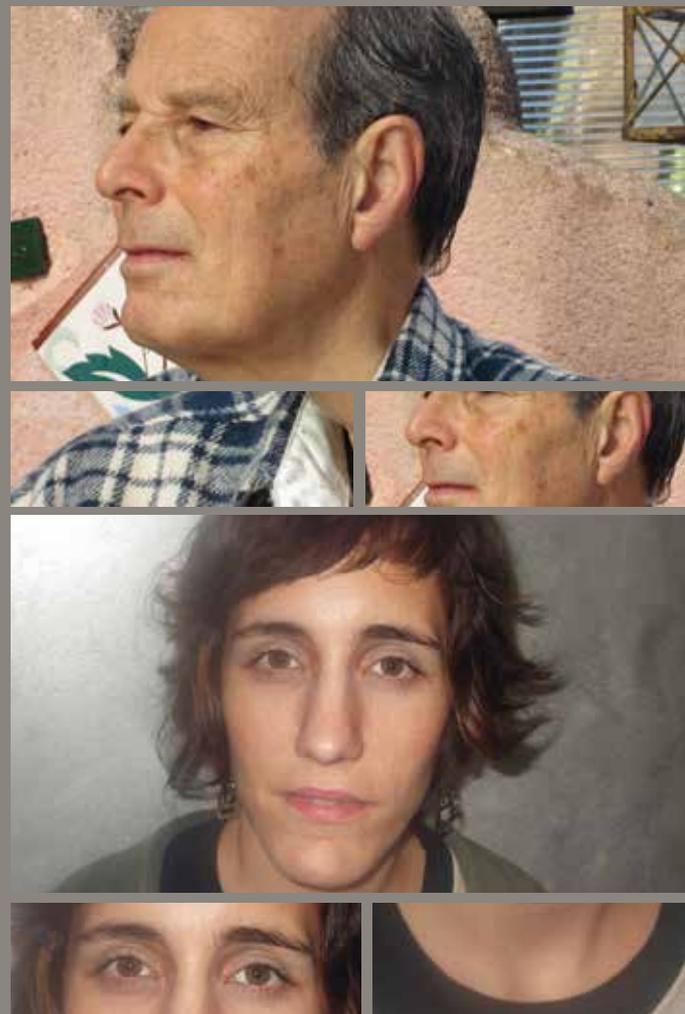
We would like to underline that the character and intrinsic value of this international year are being shaped by family farmers themselves. They work diligently for their valuable and important rural way of life, which is marked by a special bond with nature. They, together with the World Rural Forum, convinced the international community of the need to dedicate a year to family farming.

The IYFF is our opportunity to promote universal recognition of the role of women and men family farmers, who provide food to humanity in a sustainable way. We must use the IYFF to get our governments to agree on policies that respond to the demands of family farmers worldwide, such as access to land and water, improving the status of women and youth, access to markets and credits, and strengthening farmer organisations. In summary, we must support the right of peoples to produce a large part of their own food, guaranteeing their food security as a step towards achieving food sovereignty.

In many countries, national IYFF committees of agricultural and rural organisations are doing exactly this. They are designing a large number of activities, events, lectures, research, meetings, festivals and policy proposals calling for priority support for family farming. We encourage you make contact with and participate in your own national IYFF committee, through your farmer organisations, through us, or through our allies in the AgriCultures Network, to make your voices heard by governments.

Let's seize the IYFF 2014 to achieve a substantial improvement at all levels of the rights and the lives of so many millions of women and men farmers, indigenous peoples, traditional fishermen, herders and landless laborers.

José Antonio Osaba and **Laura Lorenzo** are members of the World Rural Forum, which was instrumental in the campaign for the International Year of Family Farming. The authors co-ordinate global civil society activities for the IYFF (www.familyfarmingcampaign.net).
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This is the moment

From farmer-pastoralist conflicts to profitable alliances

The area around Wum in the Northwest Province of Cameroon is notorious as a conflict hotspot. As pressure increases on available land, conflicts occur more frequently between sedentary family farmers and pastoral communities. Farmer-pastoralist alliances are helping to resolve the conflicts by transforming the relationships between these families

Charles Kacho Tah

Farming and pastoral families in Wum Central Sub-Division have both used the land since time immemorial. However the customary tenure system is increasingly being overruled by the costly, cumbersome and corrupt land tenure law, under which it is difficult for poor farmers and pastoralists to secure their land rights legally. Farming and pastoralist families can be suddenly evicted from what can overnight be referred to as “state land”. In the Wum area, the relatively recent introduction of an expanding industrial tea estate has made land grabbing, exclusion and conflicts a new and growing reality for family farmers and pastoralists.

Two groups, one land Arable farmers in this region generally cultivate a plot of land until low soil fertility forces them to move to a new plot. Pastoralists, in their attempts to cope with unreliable rainfall patterns, move their livestock seasonally from one grazing ground to another. While in the past these systems co-existed in harmony, more recently they have been breaking down with violent conflicts ensuing. Access to land for both groups was at the centre of these conflicts. The farmers’ perceptions about their entitlement to land and the pastoralists’ relative wealth and power have made it difficult for the two communities to resolve these conflicts between themselves. Their increasingly extreme positions meant that an outside party was needed to create a dialogue and to stimulate a process of change.

In 2007, SNV Netherlands Development Organisation started to work with these communities, developing an approach to conflict resolution based on dialogue at the community level. Involving local councils, nine “farmer-pastoralist platforms” in nine conflict-prone villages in the Wum area were created. These platforms bring together representatives of the farming and pastoralist communities and traditional leaders. They discuss peaceful solutions and make annual plans that regulate which crop and livestock activities will occur where and when. In total, over 40 dialogue platforms have been created in eleven subdivisions in Cameroon.

Farming alliances An SNV study showed a 65% reduction in conflicts between 2007 and 2010 in Wum. The farmer-pastoralist platforms foster the emergence of mutually beneficial farming alliances rather than conflicts that degenerate into uncontrollable situations. These alliances constitute a farming partnership between a pastoralist family and one or more farm families under which the pastoralists’ animals are permitted onto arable land after the harvest. The pastoralist family benefits because the animals feed freely off the crop residue. The farm family benefits from the animals’ manure: arable farms



Better crops and healthier animals

Farmer Delphine Fuh and pastoralist Sheffu Mohamadu of Naikom village, one of the villages in Wum Central Sub-Division, have been collaborating in a farming alliance since 2010. Delphine notes, with much excitement, that whereas her family used to force pastoralists from their land, today she and other farmers invite them to come onto their land. Delphine tells how her maize production has doubled, and her vegetable production tripled. At the same time she saves money as she no longer needs to buy chemical fertilizer of the livestock. She sees the results in the quality of her produce. *"Each time we harvest our vegetables my neighbours come and pay me in advance because of the exceptionally good quality and taste of my vegetables."* Delphine points out that seven new initiatives for farming alliances emerged in her neighbourhood; all because of the successful alliance between her and Sheffu.

On his side, Sheffu recounts how his animals are now much healthier because they have access to the crop residue and fresh pasture that grows just after the harvest. He spends less money on buying food for his family and herdsman because Delphine gives him access to her maize and vegetables. Sheffu has secured his grazing land from encroachment by arable farmers who used to claim more and more rights, referring to themselves as "natives" and him and the other pastoralists as "strangers". *"Although I have already lost part of my land to farmers, I am overwhelmed by the fact that ever since we started our farming alliance they are no longer demanding additional land. Not only can I bring my cattle to their farms, the farmers have also opened up tracks giving my cattle access to drinking points."*

are fertilised, allowing farmers to cultivate the same land without losing fertility.

Based on settlement patterns and geographical parameters, different variations of the basic farming alliance concept have evolved. Local organisations and leading farmers and pastoralists now promote the approach. It has also found its way into the new national legal texts such as the Pastoral Code of Cameroon.

Stronger families This experience of farmer-pastoralist alliances highlights three key areas for strengthening family farming: tenure security, conflict management and sustainable farming practices. It shows how both farming and pastoralist families can make a difference in the wider community. Dialogue creates an enabling environment for crop and livestock integration, replacing the barriers that existed before. The use of cow dung to fertilise arable land is one of the ways in which alliance farming helps pastoralist and farm families adopt more sustainable approaches. Also, farmers no longer have to resort to shifting cultivation and slash-and-burn, helping them to improve soil fertility.

The farmer-pastoralist alliances not only avoid conflict, but also lead to tenure security between farmers and pastoralists and within communities. It also promotes tenure security as a whole: where dialogue platforms are stronger the rural communities, including both farmers and pastoralists, stand united against activities of large investors. Development organisations

in the North West Region, such as the Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association are currently promoting dialogue platforms in order to strengthen community land rights for pastoralists and arable farmers and protect them from land grabbing.

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Small-scale farmers, BIG-SCALE CHANGE

The organisations working together in the Agricultural Biodiversity Knowledge Programme (agrobiodiversity@knowledged) initiated by Oxfam Novib and Hivos all work with family farmers who make a living by using, conserving and regenerating the agricultural biodiversity they have as a base. The possibility of reversing high dependence on agrichemical inputs on a large scale, particularly among family farmers who work in close-knit networks, is illustrated by the experiences of the Centre for Sustainable Agriculture (CSA) in Andhra Pradesh, India.

Zakir Hussain, G.V. Ramanjaneyulu, G. Rajashekar and G. Chandra Sekhar

Small-scale family farmers in Andhra Pradesh constitute the vast majority of farmers in the state, and are facing a deep and protracted crisis. Over the past eighteen years, more than 35,000 farmers have committed suicide – many because of enormous debts due to heavy dependencies on expensive chemicals. Pests are an issue, all farmers agree on that. However, CSA realised that for many farmers, the main problem was not pests but their addiction to pesticides. Pesticides are expensive, are harmful to the health of farmers and their families, create ecological problems and, most importantly, do not solve the problem. The more pesticides you use, the more you disturb the ecosystem, and the worse the pest problem gets. Many family farmers in Andhra Pradesh have experienced this firsthand. It became clear that there was a pressing need for a solution to

this problem. Farmers, NGOs and government jointly rolled out an effective strategy to widely spread the use of Non-Pesticidal Management (NPM).

Non-Pesticidal Management

A radical change was needed: the first step in stopping pests is to stop using pesticides and adopt integrated cropping systems and local resource-based practices. CSA works with family farmers, building on their knowledge, to make this change happen. NPM was developed during the early 1980s and has proven to be effective in different parts of the state. The basic philosophy behind NPM is to train farmers to better understand insect biology and behaviour and the crop ecosystem, building on their own knowledge and skills.

For family farmers, who live on their land and have a close relationship with all the crops they cultivate, NPM is a logical strategy. Their physical proximity to

the land means that family farmers often have an intimate understanding of it and its workings. In addition farming families are well aware of the hazards posed by exposure to these chemicals which can immediately affect all family members, through the air, their skin and their food.

In 2004, CSA set up Farmer Field Schools in twelve villages in Andhra Pradesh to help farmers develop their knowledge about pest management. Family farmers learnt to understand their agro-ecosystems and plan their crop cycles accordingly. Today the programme covers about 11,000 villages.

Andhra Pradesh used to have the highest pesticide consumption rate in India, but today it has one of the lowest. The villages that have given up chemical pesticides have not seen a pest outbreak in the last six years, and their yields have not decreased.

Different paths for scaling up

In development circles, one of the major questions that continuously arises is how to scale up best practices. The enormous change in attitudes towards pesticides in Andhra Pradesh provides a good illustration on how this can be done. By expanding, adapting or sustaining successful initiatives and the underlying philosophies, CSA has been able to reach many people in different places and over time. Instead of *re-inventing* the wheel, we *re-use* the wheel and learn from the practice of inventing. Without this process, a number of valuable experiences would remain scattered as “islands of success”.



For family farmers, Non-Pesticidal Management is a logical strategy. Photo: Mr Adinarayana

Success stories can be scaled up in different ways. They can spread spontaneously, or projects can be directly replicated by NGOs or government, or be propelled by grassroots movements spreading particular ideas and methods wider. In CSA's experience, two successful strategies for scaling up took place: collaboration between NGOs and the government, and scaling up by farmers themselves, as they adopt the concept of NPM and adapt it to their local conditions.

From farmer to farmer Pudukula is a small tribal village in Andhra Pradesh's Khammam district, which has acted as a beacon of hope for all the distressed farmers in the state. Pudukula formally declared itself pesticide free in 2003. All of its farmers adopted alternative pest management strategies and became the navigators for a new development paradigm. They developed a simple and affordable method of preventing pests, based on understanding the pest's life cycles, and have since become experts in disseminating this technology in their region. Their success was widely recorded in the media and convinced the state Minister of Agriculture to scale up the approach.

In this case, the state government became motivated to scale up alternative farming practices after observing that they were being successfully adopted by farmers. Yet it is also an illustration of a bottom-up scaling up strategy. The wide spread of NPM in the state can be attributed to horizontal expansion from farmer to farmer. As people live and work on the land, farmers readily share new knowledge within and between communities. They understand other farmers' situations and can explain concepts and ideas in their own language. CSA enabled farmers to teach others in their communities and beyond. The small and labour-intensive scale of most operations, the closely knit social networks and the proximity to each others' farms means that this method works well in family farming communities.

Women played a particularly important role in this process, contributing to rapid change in hundreds of

The Agricultural Biodiversity Knowledge Programme (agrobiodiversity@knowledged) aims to generate and share evidence and insights that will be of value for enhancing agricultural biodiversity. It aims to contribute to a change from mainstream high-input agricultural systems to biodiverse systems that serve farmers and nature; that ensure food and nutrition security; and that respect people and their knowledge and choices. For more information contact Sarah Doornbos (s.doornbos@hivos.nl).



Scaling up initiatives like NPM can take place with government assistance, and from farmer to farmer.
Photo: Mr Adinarayana

villages. Women's self-help groups were at the forefront of the grassroots movement that took charge of their farming, built their own capacities and found a way out of the agrarian distress they had been experiencing. Women clearly understood the benefits of non-chemical farming, which brought them economic, social and health benefits. As more and more women's groups heard about this programme they began to demand that it be initiated in their villages too, and convinced their men that chemicals are not needed for farming.

Rolling out NPM Often governments claim that farmers are not interested in shifting away from pesticide use. Yet the successful farmer-to-farmer spread of NPM in Andhra Pradesh provided hands-on experience about the feasibility of scaling up NPM. Family farmers are ready to change, whether or not the government is ready. Farmers take up new approaches when they see and experience the lasting benefits, even if such an approach is not supported by government extension programmes. Fortunately in the case of Andhra Pradesh, government departments were willing to support CSA's approach and eventually established a scaling-up programme called "Community Managed Sustainable Agriculture".

The roll-out began with CSA piloting the programme with partner NGOs, after which the State Department for Rural Development helped to further replicate it. The success of this collaboration depends on the actors sharing similar or complementary objectives: CSA's goal to mainstream an alternative solution to pesticide use overlapped well with government's aim to improve livelihoods through cost reduction in farming. Based on the lessons in Andhra Pradesh, the national level "Women Farmers Empowerment Programme" has subsequently been implemented in several states across the country.

Joint ownership with the government has given the programme the potential for becoming more than an

island of success. The partnership with the state government has expanded the programme's reach and has influenced policy at a state and national level. The state government has also benefitted from tapping into the expertise of NGOs, who act as innovators, developing and testing solutions, whereas governments are often tied to established procedures and often unwilling to take risks or adopt innovative approaches. Such collaboration requires trust and mutual acknowledgment between the partners involved, in order to dispel fears of being co-opted or one party having exclusive control.

Effective upscaling: the clue to sustainability

The sustainability of any farming practice or innovation might be judged based on the potential for scaling up of that practice. Many thousands of farmers have reported that ecological practices for managing pests, diseases and soil productivity are effective and successful. There is a wealth of evidence about how this model is economically viable and increases farmers' self confidence. Reportedly, farmers who had mortgaged their lands to meet their debts are now able to reclaim ownership over their land. Out-migration has reduced and farming is once again a dignified occupation. Finally, women farmers have proven again that when they are in the driver's seat, their development approaches are more eco-sensitive, equitable, sustainable and have a longer term perspective.

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In 2003, African Heads of State made a commitment to invest at least 10% of their national budgets into agriculture by 2015. Many countries are still far from reaching this percentage. And those who have, such as Burkina Faso, are investing in biotechnology, large-scale use of chemical fertilizers, mechanisation, irrigation, pesticides and genetically modified seeds. These investments do not meet the priorities of family farmers, especially those of women. With recurrent food crises and a growing number of vulnerable people facing hunger, more and more voices are calling out for a drastic change in agricultural policies.

Therefore the International Year of Family Farming in 2014 is very timely. It stresses the need for appropriate investment in sustainable family farming. What type of farming needs to be supported?

For generations, family farmers in Burkina Faso have coped with famine by innovating and diversifying food production. They protect biodiversity, soil and water and improve productivity by using agro-ecological practices such as mulching, using organic manure, building rock barriers that catch water, and cleverly managing local seeds.

Alimata is one of these farmers. She is a leader in Tiguli village, in the east of the country. The land her family granted her is largely barren and eroded. Her yield used to barely cover her family's needs. However, with perseverance and using agro-ecological practices, she is now self-sufficient and produces enough food for her family all year round, even generating some surplus to invest in other activities.

Supporting family farmers like Alimata will both protect them and help them reach their full potential. Appropriate policies and measures should include:

- secure and easy access to resources, such as credit and land;
- support for farmers who practice agro-ecological techniques;
- access to fair markets, including adequate roads and transportation, and protection against dumping;
- better inclusion of women farmers in financial and technical support schemes, in country level planning and budgeting; and
- appropriate facilities for food storage and processing, to add value and avoid post-harvest losses.

Family farming can feed the world and strengthen resilience. The International Year of Family Farming brings hope to many small-scale farmers, who are counting on firm steps at international, national and local levels.

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This was Fatou Batta's last column. The editors of Farming Matters would like to thank Fatou for her inspiring contributions.



2014: Hope for family farmers

LEARNING from new peasants



In rural Valencia, Spain, youth unemployment exceeds 50 percent. However, young people are not waiting for outsiders to come and solve their problems. An excursion to local initiatives in the region proved to be a wonderful opportunity to learn from new, young peasants about self-organised development.

Vincent Delobel

In June 2013, our group of students visited the Mediterranean village of Benidoleig, located in Alicante, Valencia. In search of inspiring locally led experiences, we came across José Manuel Bisetto. He is the leader of a grassroots initiative for healthier living, entitled “Agricultología”. José Manuel (33) has a PhD, but decided to follow his childhood dream and become a peasant.

Uniting a farmer community On the land that belonged to his grandfather, whose son was not interested in farming, José Manuel coordinates shared organic vegetable gardens. Since 2006, once abandoned plots are once again being cultivated, using locally available ecological resources and generating high quality products. These activities connect neighbours to each other and to their

environment and provide healthy food. Each of the fifty plots on this new farm feeds one family. One hundred boxes of organic vegetables are sold every week at a price between 5-10 Euro, which is affordable for consumers and fair for the farmers. This income makes the farm self-sustaining and allows for further developments.

The people who work these plots also exchange knowledge, tips and seeds and help each other. Trust and reciprocity are cornerstones of this new way of farming, which increases people's feelings of responsibility for their own food and community. "*Agricultoría primarily offers an opportunity to farm, to create a centre where people can experiment with organic gardening,*" José Manuel explains. "*We provide a different and innovative way of engaging in agriculture, that brings people in touch with nature. We have found that it is very motivating for people to get access to healthy and affordable food.*"

Alongside food production, José Manuel's multi-functional farm also offers educational facilities to help children to reconnect with soil, plants and animals. José Manuel invests in relationships with other like-minded people: colleagues, officials at the municipality, as well as scientists at the Polytechnic University of Valencia. He continuously tries to develop the initiative, integrating aspects such as food forests, bioconstruction and medicinal plants. *Agricultoría* has become a centre for experimentation and training in organic farming and the environment through visits, adult training and extracurricular activities. It is now a reference and pollinator for various other projects in the area.

Re-peasantisation in Spain José Manuel's initiative is part of an emerging trend of the "re-peasantisation" of rural Spain, something that is happening amidst a context of economic crisis but also the continued general decline of agricultural activities. In Valencia, only four percent of the economically active population is employed in the agricultural sector, and 90% of this group are older than 40.

Since the end of Franco's dictatorship in 1975, the country has been striving for citizen-led democracy. Although the state invested heavily in technology transfer programmes that provided pesticides, fertilizers and mechanisation services for over half a century, they generally did not meet the needs of rural families. As a result, farming was not regarded as attractive anymore.

Spain is one of Europe's major organic food producers, but most of the produce is exported. In recent years, a number of small organic initiatives have started to spring up various places, usually initiated by small groups of people going back to rural areas in search of a better quality of life and an income. This

phenomenon of re-peasantisation can be seen throughout Europe.

Learning from positive examples Local initiatives, such as José Manuel's, are potential seedbeds for change. Interdependence around healthy food, based on trust and reciprocity, give way to new networks and new patterns of food production and local markets. This contributes to local employment, health and sustainability. We also see that it creates bridges between all the people involved, including farmers, businessmen, universities, NGOs and the government.

What can we learn from José Manuel's experience about such *self-organised change*, or change that is borne from practice? First, it responds to a need and a local context. The initiative in Benidoleig makes use of three elements of the local context: it was built on one of the many available pieces of abandoned land, it

José Manuel Bisetto and the agro-ecological gardens offer a space for learning Photo: Ximo Vidal



responded to a situation of youth unemployment, and it used existing local knowledge about vegetable production.

Secondly, it helps us understand that change often happens unplanned and “in the social wild”. It is unpredictable and may happen in a creative way, outside the conventions of research and policy centres. Who would have thought that José Manuel and his community would take up vegetable gardening collectively? His initiative generated various novelties. By creating new markets, creative agro-ecological food production systems, collective working spaces and shorter food supply chains. People got involved in all of these activities with different intentions, and not necessarily with the aim to go exactly in the same direction. As

such, we learn that self-organised change cannot be guided, monitored or planned: it may even be incoherent.

While planning for these initiatives might be impossible, it is important to acknowledge their merits. Each of them emerges out of real needs, intentions and perspectives. Having demonstrated that they can provide a basis for social cohesion and positive change, they deserve greater public attention and support.

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The story of Agricología

“After finishing my PhD, I lived and worked abroad for a while. But I missed life in my childhood village. When I returned, I started looking for a way to innovate in agriculture. I wanted to practice a type of agriculture that provided leisure and entertainment – a social and cultural kind of farming where people can share enthusiasm, effort and fellowship. So in 2006 I created Agricología, where we seek a balance between ecology, environment, social participation, culture and tradition.

Recently, we have started to work in other municipalities that are interested in the Agricología approach. For example, I am working on the revival of Moscatel grapes in a nearby ecological village. In co-operation with the Polytechnic University of Valencia we are looking for ways to sell the grapes locally, reducing food kilometres and CO₂ emissions. Also, in primary schools I teach children about organic gardening, animals, the environment and various other aspects of food production.

During the start-up phase, other people in the village regarded me as a weirdo. Why would a person with a PhD on innovation go back to the field? Most families in the region try to send their children to school so they can engage in other professions than agriculture. But I was very interested in returning to the land and starting a farm. Even though I have not formally studied agriculture, my grandfather taught me about vegetable farming since I was a child.

My goal was to give life to this land that was so heavily mistreated by all kinds of pesticides and herbicides; that had become unproductive, lifeless. And look at it now. All kinds of living animals, micro-organisms and trees live on this land, which at the same time is a social and

educational space for the community. Now, after seven years, I am starting to receive appreciation and support from the local community.

There were other difficult moments. As Agricología is different and innovative, local bureaucrats did not have anything to compare it to and created many administrative hurdles. Rules that are developed for large companies make it difficult for local, sustainable projects like Agricología, even though it has clearly given the village a boost through increased tourism and trade.

To others who want to undertake a similar initiative, I would recommend to first develop a good plan that includes your goals and vision of the project, as well as the technical, economic and political viability. Along the way you will find both barriers and support. When you bump against these barriers and you fall, get up and continue. Proof that this strategy works, is the flourishing of Agricología and the various awards that it has won.

I feel a strong need to share experiences like mine across Europe, knowing that in different places there are young people with initiatives that, without although they may not speak the same language, are united in the wish to keep the villages and rural communities that our ancestors passed on to us alive. We have to come together to train people to keep our culture and traditions alive, because if they are gone, much of our heritage will also be lost.”

José Manuel Bisetto is the founder of Agricología. In 2009, he won the Spanish National Award as best business project, in 2010 he won the award for best business idea in rural tourism in the province of Alicante and in 2012 he received the award for best innovative project in the district of Marina Alta. For more information: info@agricologia.es or visit <http://www.agricologia.es>



BEYOND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Flipping perspectives on learning

Agricultural professionals are increasingly looking for new developments in training methods. We hear many theories about “what works”, but how do we translate these into an effective ways of developing knowledge? The expert meeting “Beyond Knowledge Sharing” aimed to facilitate this transition from knowledge to practice.

Agri-ProFocus

We know how people don't learn: by keeping daylight and oxygen out of the room, by making them listen for more than 15 minutes, and by making them sit down. Yet this is how every classroom in the world is organised.” Kicking off with these words, 85 professionals from ministries, research institutes, educational institutes, NGOs and small private companies were inspired to think critically about the context of learning. What works? How does new knowledge become attractive for farmers and practitioners? The expert meeting, held in Den Bosch (the Netherlands) on October 22nd, 2013, practically explored some answers to these questions.

Different tools and concepts can help take learning to the next level. Some training experts shared their experience by (re)introducing methods such as using comic strips as a communication vehicle, making a message clear to a large range of audiences in a simple way. Or how about the use of simulations, or role-plays, to learn entrepreneurial skills? By acting out real-life situations people learn about verbal and non-verbal communication and commercial skills. For instance how would you, as the leader of a co-operative, respond to unreasonable requests and pressure from large companies? And how are such encounters experienced by the other party? In this way, students do not learn from the teacher, but the group learns from their own and others' responses and experiences.

Another lesson explored was the importance of long-term support in developing knowledge. A long-term presence in the region has many advantages over a short “in-and-out” training. Some shared their experiences with translating a traditionally once-off publication into a “coaching track”. We must not forget to fo-

cus on people's needs: clients should be co-producers of the services they receive. Their responses and needs should be part of service delivery, including knowledge building.

More than anything, the expert meeting embodied the drive towards innovation by bringing different actors together. Listening to others and taking a new perspective on learning lies at the heart of innovation. As one speaker at the meeting reminded us “real renewal comes from outsiders at the fringes of the existing system”.

The expert meeting was organised by Agri-ProFocus in collaboration with MDF Training & Consultancy, the International Centre for development oriented Research in Agriculture (ICRA) and HAS University of Applied Sciences in Den Bosch. For more information, contact info@agri-profocus.nl



Photo: Esther Mauriks



Some may view indigenous communities as being conservative and backwards. However, the Kabekwa in Costa Rica show that such communities can be adaptable and innovative. In response to changing circumstances, this community has been adapting its farming practices constantly, benefiting from it in multiple ways.

Georges Félix and Cristian Timmermann

The Kabekwa have developed farming systems that go far beyond the provision of food: systems that allow family members to develop and enjoy their intelligence, physical strength and social skills, whilst awaking their curiosity and creativity. Their independence from external inputs makes the families more resilient and autonomous, while being able to determine how and what to farm adds meaning to their work and life.

Over the centuries, the Kabekwa have developed this farming system based on local knowledge and resources. They have continued and improved their farming practices for centuries, based on what we now call agro-ecological principles. While innovations are ongoing, this continues to be the basis of their farming system, even though the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides has become widespread in the world around them. Their living conditions make external inputs an illogical choice: more than 40% of Kabekwa families are in remote areas with difficult access for vehicles and remote markets.

Farming with nature The Kabekwa are the second-largest indigenous ethnic group in Costa Rica, their population is currently estimated to be around 14,000. They mostly live in the Talamanca mountain range, in the heart of the country, and manage more than one million hectares of stunning ever-green and ever-humid vegetation. This area lies immediately adjacent to one of the most important biological zones of all Central America, the Indigenous Reserve of Chirripó.

Rosalinda and Juan García Pérez and their 11 children live on this reserve, three hours from Grano de Oro, the main village and closest road access. They use and manage a fenceless 80 hectare parcel that they inherited from their ancestors. Farming is their main activity. Juan and Rosalinda cultivate coffee, bananas, cassava, beans and many other crops. They also take care of chickens, pigs and a horse. The youngest children harvest fruit from the surrounding patches of forest. The eldest son (17 years old) transports the produce daily to the nearest market on a horse, the only available means of transport other than walking. He

sells the surplus produce in order to buy the few things that are not produced in the farm, such as rice and oil.

The situation of Juan, Rosalinda and the other Kabekwa is extraordinary, as they have abundant access to natural resources, are highly self sufficient and, as a result, enjoy very good health. Lacking access to chemical inputs, such as fertilizers, they have continually built on their agro-ecological farming practices. One example is maintaining soil fertility using the nitrogen-fixing properties of various trees and bean crops.

Beans are the basis of traditional dishes and they have become the cornerstone of the community's system of crop rotation. The farmers leave the crop residues on the soil to decompose and be recycled with the residues turning into nutrients that are readily available for new crops. This practice closes a nutrient loop (one of the principles of agro-ecology), and imitates nature: it is very similar to what happens to leaf litter in the surrounding forests. The farming families of the Kabekwa also value and stimulate tree diversity, as attested by the abundance of Poró trees (*Erythrina poeppigiana*) in the farms. The farmers encourage this nitrogen-fixing tree to grow in their fields, because the leaves and branches provide abundant nitrogen-rich organic matter that feed the crops and the soils.

Meaning and self-fulfilment Using little or no outside inputs for their farming activities, the Kabekwa not only produce enough food, medicine and income but, in the process, they also develop and enjoy many physical and social skills that contribute to their overall quality of life.

Family farmers like the García Pérez family use and develop their creativity and intelligence in finding ways to adapt to new circumstances and explore alternative income sources. For example, they introduced cattle and cash crops, such as cocoa and coffee, which meant altering their traditional agricultural systems. Curiosity, creativity and intelligence led some families to start experimenting with planting coffee in places where the canopy of existing native fruit and timber trees would protect the coffee shrubs.

Learning and teaching play a central role. The Kabekwa culture has a tight social cohesion and all family members play a role. The elders teach the youngest how to maintain the balance in the family and in the farm, how to stay in good health and how to identify what plants will cure a given disease. The inexperienced respect the experienced, but the experienced also value those who will continue their legacy, since young minds are essential for the community to come up with diverse solutions towards attaining food, fibre and medicinal self-sufficiency.

While playing around on the farm and surrounding land, the children of the Kabekwa constantly learn

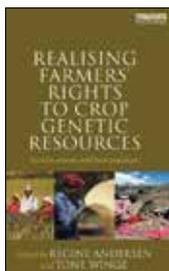
how to recognise edible plants and when and how to harvest each species. A lot of manual labour is needed to maintain the farm and, while helping out, the youth grow strong and develop innovative ways of dealing with challenging situations on the farm.

Classic agronomy often leaves out the human aspect of farming systems or treat it as a marginal dimension. Yet, the Kabekwa demonstrate how agro-ecology can provide multiple dimensions of meaning and self-fulfilment to the work and life of farmers.

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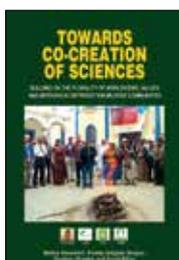
The Kabekwa benefit from their farming systems in multiple ways. Photo: Georges Félix



Realising farmers' rights to crop genetic resources: Success stories and best practices.

R. Andersen and T. Winge (eds.), 2013. Routledge, Oxon. 214 pages.

The diversity of crops can equip farmers to meet challenges of marginal soils, crop pests and diseases, drought and changing environmental conditions. Farmers not only conserve this diversity but also continuously adapt the crops to changing environmental conditions, keeping their knowledge of these crops alive. To do this effectively farmers need the right to save, use, exchange and sell seeds, to participate in decision making and benefit sharing, and to have their traditional knowledge protected. This book looks at success stories, spanning across a whole range of countries and continents, on how these rights have been realised. It looks at the future challenges and ways forward.



Towards co-creation of sciences: Building on the plurality of worldviews, values and methods in different knowledge communities

B. Haverkort, F. Delgado Burgoa, D. Shankar and D. Millar, 2012. Nimby Books, New Delhi. 291 pages.

There are many local, endogenous, and traditional ways of knowing that successfully guide the lives of many people across the world. These can be considered as expressions of science in their own right. However, they are often thought of as less valid than empirical mainstream science which continues to form the basis of formal education and which receives the lion's share of public funding. This book presents the worldviews, values, methods and concepts from four different knowledge communities in Ghana, India, Bolivia and the Netherlands. The authors argue that a plurality of sciences is the best option to meet the sustainability challenges of our time.



Women's rights and the right to food: Report submitted by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food

O. de Schutter, 2012. UN, Rome. 20 pages.

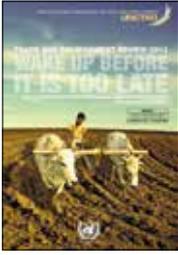
Women should be at the centre of food security strategies, and not only for their own sake. When women have the same access to farms' productive resources as men, yields increase by 20-30%. When they have control over the household budget, their children's chance of survival increases by 20%. But too often women have a weak bargaining position in the family farm, leading them to be restricted to household tasks and have less time to seek outside jobs, education or political participation. This report looks at different ways through which access to food can be secured and outlines a strategy to eliminate discrimination against women based on human rights.



The future of agriculture: Synthesis of an online debate

OXFAM, 2013. Canadian Foodgrains Bank, Winnipeg. 94 pages.

With an ever growing pile of reports, papers and books on feeding the world, the time has come to be selective. This discussion paper by OXFAM addresses the issue in a very creative way. It is a synthesis of an online debate, complemented by 23 essays by experts from 16 countries. It addresses issues of who is in control, biofuels, the risks faced by farmers and investments in agriculture. While the debate did not reach a consensus, there were a few points of general agreement. Perhaps the most significant is that "multi-pronged approaches are needed, with much more attention paid to the potential of agro-ecological, biodiverse systems" to address contemporary global challenges.



Trade and environment review 2013: Wake up before it is too late

UNCTAD, 2013. FAO, Rome. 200 pages.

UNCTAD's message is clear. What we need is a "rapid and significant shift from conventional, monoculture-based and high external-input dependent industrial production towards mosaics of sustainable, regenerative production systems that also considerably improve the productivity of small-scale farmers." This is because the dominant model of agriculture is failing. Food prices are increasing, agricultural productivity is stagnant or in decline, the global nitrogen and greenhouse gas emissions limits have been crossed and one billion people are chronically underfed. So, how can we change that? By shifting towards diverse production patterns that close nutrient cycles and by localising food production as much as possible.



Right to food and nutrition watch 2013: Alternatives and resistance to policies that generate hunger

E. Black, A. Graham, A. Mann, L. Winter, 2013 (eds.), FIAN International, Amsterdam. 98 pages.

With UN resources and international solidarity between states in decline, collaboration with major corporations in major development projects has become the new fad in international affairs. However, the interests of these corporations do not always coincide with that of the public. Sustainable alternatives have emerged from civil society and social movements that are "founded on the participation of all people concerned and adapted to fit their needs". This year's right to food and nutrition watch explores "policies that generate hunger" in the area of: public private partnerships, gender, farmers' seed right and small-scale fisheries. The final part looks at the development of twelve countries in terms of the right to adequate food and nutrition.

More on family farming

Multilateral organisations, NGOs, scientists and farmer and social movements are all becoming more concerned over the issue of family farming. But what is family farming and why is it so valuable? The publication "In defence of family farms: which ones and why?" (Coordination SUD, 2008) provides a short overview on the importance of family farms. "Investing in smallholder agriculture for food security and nutrition" (HLPE 2013) gives a comprehensive definition of family farming and uses this as a basis for identifying the types of investment that best support family farms. The publication "Smallholders, food security and the environment" (UNEP 2013) elaborates on why

we should invest in smallholders and argues that this requires a transformation in agricultural investment.

From an academic perspective "The new peasantries: struggles for autonomy and sustainability in an era of empire and globalisation" (J.D. van der Ploeg, 2008) explores the new challenges that family farmers face and how they are dealing with them. La Via Campesina (the international peasant's movement) has a website which gives access to numerous resources on the struggles of, and alternatives put forward by, family farmers. It also includes its publication: "Sustainable peasant and family farm agriculture can feed



the world" (2010). Finally the important role that family farmers play in Africa is described in "Family farmers for sustainable food systems: a synthesis of reports by African farmers' regional networks on models of food production, consumption and markets." (EAFF, ROPPA and PROPAC, 2013). (LvdB)

Family farmers and the many ways in which they contribute to food security, healthy landscapes and thriving rural communities can be supported in a number of ways. These are some initiatives from around the world.

Nepal

Women's leadership

In Nepal's patriarchal society, particularly in rural areas, discrimination of women is still very much part and parcel of daily life. Yet farming families can only generate sustainable livelihoods when there is gender equity and equality. This is why the Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC Nepal) continuously advocates for the economic, social and cultural rights of women at the community and national levels. Through support programmes for women as well as trainings for women, youth *and* men, WOREC Nepal helps develop rural women's leadership capacities and increases their participation in decision making in the household and on the farm. WOREC has been



working with women in the Udayapur district, who have now established their own active farmer groups and community organisations, and have started talking about gender equality and equity, women's rights and participation in decision making. WOREC developed a participatory extension mechanism through local community based organisations, where women actively participate in agricultural development. WOREC's work is unique in the region, as it focuses on empowering marginalised people in violence-affected communities. By working with a gender perspective, identifying the problems and needs of all family members and mobilising farmer groups, this work is helping to strengthen eco-friendly family farming in the region.

For more information contact Sabnam Rai, Agriculture Programme Officer at WOREC Nepal. E-mail: awaicha.sabnam@gmail.com

"Our family farm helped us to survive"

After 17 years as a bank employee Augustine Temba and his wife and children moved to their family's farm near Monrovia just before Liberia's civil war started. The war left the country's physical infrastructure in tatters, meaning it was very difficult to make any return on distributing or selling food. Despite low profits, Augustine and his family have continued farming, because the future of their community depends on it. The rebel troops came in 1990 and took everything from the farm. But the Tembas didn't leave. The farm was a safety net and Augustine knew if they continued to grow rice, they would always have food. His children began to see farming in a new light. *"All around us people went hungry. We realised just how important agriculture is for the wider population,"* says one. When humanitarian aid arrived, they recognised the Temba farm as a viable source of rice, trading rice for bags of wheat. The children helped move the food

to refugee camps in exchange for other commodities. The family farm was more than a business, the farm was survival. And this is still the case now that peace has returned to the country. The USAID Food and Enterprise Development Programme began supporting the Temba farm in early 2013, establishing a community project with 35 neighbouring families. By supporting the Temba family and other family farms, the programme builds on the strength and resilience of Liberia's own farmers and promotes food security in the country.

For more information contact Nicholas Parkinson at USAID. E-mail: nico.parco@gmail.com



Kenya

Farmers teaching farmers

In Kenya's western county of Siaya, family farmers are putting agro-ecological knowledge at the heart of their communities. With Peer to Peer (P2P) training, farmers learn from each other in a way that empowers them to use their skills to innovate and to adapt techniques and ideas to their local context. Farmers first participate in a two-week intensive course on agro-ecological techniques, gender, social development and the environment, conducted by the initiative Send a Cow. At the heart of the course are soft skills rather than technical abilities, such as listening, communication, resourcefulness, humbleness, and flexibility. After this, the participants return to their community to train their peers, where their newly acquired skills contribute towards building agro-ecological practices that fit with the reality of family farmers in their particular community and environment. This enables farmers in the community to build knowledge together with a trainer from their own community, one whom they trust, who

is accessible and can demonstrate the techniques in his or her own fields. By putting a permanent source of knowledge into the community, the approach supports farmers to confidently lead the change they want to see. Using peers to catalyse this change is a promising approach that has not been much used before. It could greatly contribute to the prosperity of agro-ecological family farming and its attractiveness for future generations.



For more information contact **Martin Vieira, Policy Executive at Send a Cow. E-mail: Martin.Vieira@sendacow.org.uk**

Guatemala

Mayan family gardens

Responding to increasing climate change risks, Mayan families in Tzununá in the department of Solola, Guatemala, have developed food diversification strategies by managing family gardens. These gardens have been maintained by rural households for centuries. But the multifunctional gardens provide families with more than just food. The variety of species have many uses, including medicine, construction and craft materials, shade, fuel, recreation, fodder and drinks. This type of farming helps families with limited access to land to improve their food and nutrition security by diversifying their production, increasing their incomes, and providing them with

a number of environmental services, such as water and waste recycling, protecting soil against erosion, and maintaining or increasing local biodiversity. In addition, family gardens can be a place for innovation and learning. They function as open classrooms or living laboratories, where learning-by-doing (in small but significant moments) can encourage families and their neighbours to improve their production practices every day. The analysis of 24 gardens in four Mayan Kaqchiquel communities in Tzununá revealed that women are primarily responsible for the management of family gardens in the community and are often the sole caretakers of these agro-ecosystems. In such a way, garden agriculture increases women's autonomy and decision-making opportunities. All these attributes give Mayan family gardens the potential to be more adaptive to climate change.



For more information contact **Henry Ruiz Solsol at the Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Centre (CATIE). E-mail: hruiz@catie.ac.cr**

When family farmers lead their OWN development

Steven Kiranga Gichanga is a family farmer in Mugaari, a village in Kenya. He was trained in goat rearing but could not afford a goat to get started. He was also trained in bee keeping but could not afford a bee hive either. After a community reflection forum in 2012, Steven became aware of his own creative capacities and his ability to think outside the box. Then he came up with a brilliant idea.

Laure Guibert

A change in approach Steven's story is a good example of a people-led development approach, through which people's needs, capacities, opportunities and priorities define development pathways. Caritas Embu is an organisation that now uses this as its guiding principle. In the past, we gave trainings in livestock upgrading, crop development and soil and water conservation in the hope that this would increase rural people's food security. But we started to receive signals from staff and community members that this was not working for everyone. The poorest section of the population tended to be left out. They don't always have land or money to invest in the technologies we promoted, such as hybrid seeds. When we shifted to a people-led development approach, we saw a radical change.

At first the change sounded threatening. We asked ourselves: if we need to change, does it mean that what we have been doing so far was wrong? Is the community able to take the lead? In the communities itself, people worried that material support was coming to an end.

Over time, people-led development nurtured in our minds, in our way of dealing with communities and in our style of facilitating activities. The communities also came to embrace it. We all started to realise that a people-led approach was an opportunity to realise the full potential of local communities which had been underestimated, unused or biased towards pre-set development measures. This transition took three years.

Local knowledge and practices

In the process, we learned a lot about the benefits of our new approach. People are more likely to reach their own development objectives when they are able to take the lead – even when these may differ from the expected results determined by NGOs. And, they are more likely to use their own resources and skills, which are abundant in Kenya.

// *started to plant watermelon seeds in polythene bags two weeks before the rain was due, instead of planting them directly in the soil when the rains come,"* Steven said. This turned out to be a very smart move. Steven's watermelon production rose from one to five tons per season, which enabled him to buy two cows and a water pump to irrigate his watermelons. Steven now produces milk for his family and no longer purchases fertilizer since he has manure from his cows.



In a people-led development approach, farm families are encouraged to use and develop their own skills and resources Photo: Laure Guibert

For example, family farmer Isaac Kiringa from Mucaria does not need vets to treat his livestock. Instead he uses local herbs: a mix of *taballo*, ash and kales to cure goat bloat, or aloe vera sap mixed with pepper when his chickens are coughing. For human coughs, Isaac uses strings found between the back and the trunk of indigenous *mururuku* trees to chew on. For the treatment of malaria, roots of *mukau* (*Melia volcansi*), *mutongu*, *mukarau*, *makara kara* and *muthwana* trees are boiled with water. Traditional treatments are effective and free of cost to Isaac.

The region is also rich in indigenous, agro-ecological practices. This includes the use of livestock droppings to make compost manure, which is far cheaper than chemical fertilizers. Many people in the community use indigenous crop varieties that are resistant to drought.

In the new approach, farmers are encouraged to use resources available in the community to acquire what they need. Planting material can be acquired through seed exchange and community loans. “We figured that our own savings were a resource that we could rely on and use to start projects on our own,” Muringi Nicholas from Mbaraga village explains. “People feel responsible and their sense of ownership is growing, making their activities sustainable.”

Farmer-to-farmer learning We found farmer-to-farmer visits and exchanges, which emphasise learning by seeing, to be more practical than conventional trainings. As Jennifer Mwendu Njue from Rwarari village testifies, “I visited farmers in Ishiara, an area with little rain. People there are always finding ingenious responses. They were using tanks and water pans to collect running water. Some had dug small dams as well. When I came back home I constructed garters and bought a tank that can hold two thousand litres of water. I built a small irrigation system to water a one acre plot during the dry season, which lasts two to three months. I’m now able to grow vegetables and maize in the dry season and doubled my production of tomatoes, onions and carrots. My income increased from 5 to 12 thousand KSh per month.” The farmers she had visited felt proud of what they do and appreciated to be given a chance to express themselves and demonstrate their experiences.

This approach encourages family farmers to engage in a reflection process in order to identify their local resources, climate specificities, locally adaptable farming systems and endogenous practices. Unlike indigenous customs (that refer only to local, traditional habits), endogenous practices refer to both local and ex-



Communities proudly share their lessons and solutions during a farmer-to-farmer exchange in Ishiara and a group reflection in Kianjokoma. Photo: Laure Guibert

ternal practices that can be applied in particular circumstances. For example, endogenous livestock rearing involves identifying breeds that can adapt well in a specific environment in a way that is both cost effective and environmentally friendly.

Transforming our role As programme officers, we had to embrace a new role that would not overshadow the role of the community. The nature of our work has become more about facilitating a process rather than providing solutions or transferring knowledge. Because external expertise is not necessarily required to find local solutions, our role is not to promote anything but to guide farmers in a reflection about their challenges, needs, resources and priorities, and guide them through the process of defining the measures that are suitable for them and then setting

about to achieve their goals. From different tribes and clans, people are now learning from one another and leading initiatives that build unity and cohesion in their communities. Farmers are now exchanging knowledge, quality seeds and planting material on their own, strengthening their farming systems and their livelihoods. As Caritas we have gained an important insight. If NGOs and donors want to truly support family farmers, it is crucial that they provide opportunities for farmers to decide their own development path, that makes use of their own skills and resources.

Laure Guibert was volunteering with Caritas Embu in Kenya. Contact: laureguibert@gmail.com. For more information about the programme write to Mary Mate, Programme Coordinator at marymate24@yahoo.com, or to Caritas Embu at doeadmin@orange.co.ke.

New think-tanks for family farming

Family farming matters. In Africa, 60 to 70% of producers live in rural areas and they produce most of what Africa's people consume. However, despite this contribution, family farming is often sidelined in academic discussions and in agricultural policies. For instance, in Benin, the new national agricultural policy has provoked considerable debate. Some people believe that the focus of this policy needs to be on developing export-oriented agriculture in order to earn foreign exchange. However, we, and many others with us, believe that this is not suitable for small-scale farm families who have produced and fed the population of Benin for centuries. Tackling this divide will only happen if we find ways to create dialogues between the many actors involved.

Scientists and governments have a key role to play in addressing the challenges that face sustainable family farming. In order to do this, they have to create partnerships, increase multi-way communication, and improve their collaborations with others. Bridging gaps between various actors can help a joint dialogue and find common ground. Ultimately change will only occur when the government, farmers, scientists and civil society, including youth, are willing to turn things around.

We are working to develop a regional think tank to boost learning and sharing on family farming in Africa. Called "Africa Family Farming Workshops" (AFFW), this think tank has three main objectives: to encourage innovative scientific approaches and best practices of family farming, to promote

Change will only occur when all actors are willing to turn things around



Originally from Benin, **Ariel Djomakon** is the Head of the Sustainable Agriculture Division at YPAD (Youth Partnership and Agricultural Development). **Moubarakatou Tassou** is the Head of the Women's Empowerment & Youth Division at YPAD. **Lucile Gentil** is a French student. All the authors are associated with AFFW (Africa Family Farming Workshops). E-mail: ar.djomakon@ypadong.org



interdisciplinary collaboration, and to involve young agricultural professionals. It is not a new idea to gather academic researchers in periodic meetings focused on agriculture. But the AFFW innovates on three fronts. In the first place, the meetings are designed to support small-scale family farming in Africa. Secondly, academics will come from different disciplines. Finally, the workshops will also include practitioners from administrations, international organisations, civil society, farmer organisations, business and trade unions.

Through such interdisciplinary collaboration, we believe that we will be able to make family farming truly "a country's backbone of both rural development and national economic growth", to quote Eve Crowley from the FAO.

Filling the pages of our institutional diaries

ILEIA offers capacity building support on documentation and systematisation to a number of organisations around the world. From 2011 to 2013, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) invited ILEIA to guide a documentation trajectory in Eastern and Southern Africa, to enable reflection on experiences working with smallholders.

Janneke Bruil and Laura Eggens

Field staff, project co-ordinators and monitoring and evaluation officers working in three countries, (Ethiopia, Zambia and Swaziland) engaged in a process of reflection and knowledge sharing. In two consecutive workshops, these participants critically analysed their own work, thereby generating lessons learned for themselves and others. Often these lessons remain implicit, as highlighted by Alfred Mkonda from Zambia. *“We do a lot of work, but as long as we do not write our insights down there are a lot of blank pages in our institutional diaries.”*

An extended methodology

Documentation and systematisation are skills best learnt by putting them into practice straight away. Participants in the workshops select, describe and analyse an initiative that they have been involved in. These insights from their practical experiences complement textbook learning and very relevant and inspiring to fellow fieldworkers.

After the analysis, the challenge is to present the experience in a simple, readable, yet systematic way. We all know how to write a long, formal report, but how attractive are these types of texts and how effective are they in really disseminating important insights? We discussed content, audience, the structure and style of a good article, and worked towards finalising the stories in the form of an article (see box).

This process is an empowering experience for field staff and programme officers, as it validates the impor-

tance of their experiences. *“I can definitely integrate this method in my work,”* said an Ethiopian extension agent. *“Not only can I document and communicate the achievements and challenges that I face in my work, I also learn from the process itself!”*



Coached by ILEIA's editors, about 50 field staff and programme officers from Ethiopia, Zambia and Swaziland wrote articles about their lessons learnt in rural development, which were compiled in a series of booklets. All the booklets and several videos are or will be available on www.agriculturesnetwork.org.

Dambos: a land of knowledge for farmers

Inadequate water supply and a lack of irrigation facilities are one reason why many Zambian family farmers suffer from food insecurity. But for the farmers in the district of Chibombo the story is different. They are growing more food than ever, and inspired others to start to recognise the importance of farmers' indigenous knowledge.

Chibombo has a long stretch of wetland, locally known as *dambo*. In the past, the *dambo* area was not used for farming, as communities feared the muddy soil, capable of "burying somebody alive". When the region experienced terrible droughts in the late 1980s, desperation initiated a change in attitude towards farming in the *dambo* fields. The story begins with one innovative farming family.

On one fateful day, after a poor harvest from the last rainy season, Mr John Phiri, his wife Maggie and their five children decided to try planting different crops in the *dambo* field as a last resort. While they took a break to rest, they shared a watermelon that Maggie had brought with her. To their surprise, the watermelon seeds that were scattered by the children in the field grew by accident. They produced very good quality, big, juicy fruits. So did the tomatoes and vegetables that the family planted. Because of good soil fertility and an abundance of moisture in the soil, they had enough to eat and surplus to sell.

Seeing is believing

Seeing the food produced by the Phiri family encouraged neighbouring farmers to also start planting in the *dambo*, which is wet throughout the year. Some families were hesitant at first, due to long-held beliefs about wetland farming. Farmers were encouraged to learn from each other about what crops they can (and can't) grow and about diseases and pest control methods. Family farmers, such as the Phiri family, are experts about their own lands. The value of their knowledge is increasingly being recognised by other actors. As government extension officers made their routine farmer field visits, they started to catch up with what the farmers in Chibombo district were doing in the wetlands. Agricultural researchers started looking into the use of the *dambo* fields for cultivation, taking the time to learn from the Phiri family about the methodologies they used. Extension officers used the Phiri *dambo* crop field for demonstrations for other farmers in the region.



Regrettably, Chibombo farmers now face new problems. Now that more vegetables and watermelons are produced in the *dambo* fields, the market for watermelons and cabbages in the district has become flooded. As a result, the prices have gone down and the farmers feel they are being exploited by middle men. It remains important to assist the farmers to develop market linkages and technologies for value adding technologies, building on their own needs and knowledge.

Farmer knowledge

The experience in Chibombo has shown that one should not underestimate family farmers' knowledge. It is a valuable resource that can be adopted and incorporated into national and regional development programmes. Family farmers are not just recipients of knowledge, but they experiment and find out what works best in their farming systems. As such they are also important knowledge builders. This is a lesson that needs to be recognised more widely. The Zambian Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and other co-operating partners are encouraged to take up this principle and scale it up to other areas to help increase farmer productivity and food security.

Eletina Lungu-Jere is the Principal Agriculture Information Officer at the Department of National Agriculture Information Services in Zambia. She developed this article during one of the IFAD documentation workshops. E-mail: eletinaj2002@yahoo.com



In the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF), the AgriCultures Network will be buzzing with activity. The magazines within our network will be exploring aspects of family farming, such as their role in promoting biodiversity and nutrition. Network members will also be involved in many other activities, some of which are highlighted below. And you can participate too, by entering the international family farming photo competition (see p. 6).

**AME:
Launch of the IYFF**

On November 22nd, 2013, family farmers in India launched the IYFF with the support of the AME Foundation and other organisations. The farmers came from drought-prone

dryland regions in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. The purpose was not only to celebrate the launch of the year, but also to listen to farmers' experiences and seek suggestions on how family farming could be strengthened through better policies. KVS Prasad from AME says: *"It was great to hear farmers share how the family farms meet their multiple needs, including food, income and nutrition. They explained how their ecological farms bring down the costs of cultivation and their dependency on external inputs."* The event also marked the beginning of a process to explore enabling mechanisms that support smallholder family farming. Prasad: *"It is important that in India,*

primarily an agriculture-based economy, family farmers are at the forefront of strategies to support communities who deal with threatened livelihoods and ecologies."

A panel of special guests with diverse backgrounds (academic, research, administrative and civil society) recognised that family farming needs to be strongly supported and observed that present policies have a bias towards corporate agriculture. The need for smallholder extension and LEISA approaches, the use of mechanisms for collective action, the use of existing schemes for creating productive assets, and the importance of shared labour and the system of rice intensification were mentioned as possible opportunities to strengthen family farming.



Photo: G.N. Krishnamurthy

AS-PTA: Agro-ecology caravans

The National Alliance for Agro-ecology (ANA) in Brazil, in which AS-PTA takes part, is organising a number of “Agro-ecological and Cultural Caravan” tours. In various three-day caravans, farmers, NGOs, research entities and students visit examples of agro-ecological family farms in both rural and urban areas. The programme also includes cultural activities and market visits. During these three days, participants witness the social and environmental impacts of large agribusinesses in the region on family farmers.

The caravans are designed to encourage social mobilisation by showing participants the realities in which agro-ecology and agribusiness are fighting for physical, political and ideological space. The most recent of these tours was held in the urban and peri-urban areas of Rio de Janeiro. Other caravans have been successfully implemented in other states of Brazil. The tours are part of the preparatory process for Brazil’s Third National Meeting for Agro-ecology, which will be held in the first half of 2014. The central theme at this major event will be “Agro-ecological family farming as the social and economic base of the rural world”.

Goodbye and thank you Awa

Awa Faly Ba, a much respected member of IED Afrique in Senegal is leaving the AgriCultures Network to engage in new challenges. For many years, Awa co-ordinated the production of AGRIDAPE magazine, and facilitated documentation processes throughout Africa. She has made important contributions to the network’s strategies and collective learning. We thank Awa and wish her success on future paths.

ETC Andes: Documenting victory

In 2012, the Peruvian congress approved a ten year moratorium on the introduction of GM seeds into the country. The victory of Peruvian farmers and civil society over the powerful corporations that produce and commercialise GM seeds is a good example of what can be achieved when different stakeholders act together for a common objective. It is not often that the struggle against GMOs is so successful. This has led ETC Andes to analyse, document and disseminate the main lessons from this experience. Teobaldo Pinzas, director of ETC Andes: “*Family farmers, organisations and networks in other countries can benefit from this experience and find inspiration from it for their own struggles*”.

It is also important to document and disseminate this experience for use in Peru. The struggle against

GMOs is far from finished. Two years after the moratorium was announced, the government has taken no further action. There was a plan to evaluate the human health risks associated with GMOs, to review the claims of GMO producers and to implement bio-safety measures. As part of the documentation effort, ETC Andes will produce a 15 minute video in Spanish, English and French.

ILEIA: Towards another system

On February 21 and 22, as part of a large coalition of organisations in the Netherlands and Belgium, ILEIA will host a conference on the transition to fairer and more sustainable food and agricultural systems. Wageningen University will provide the stage for keynote speakers such as UN Rapporteur Olivier de Schutter, farmer leader Hanny van Geel, activist Vandana Shiva and agro-ecologist Pablo Tittone.

COLOPHON

Farming Matters

Experiences in family farming and agro-ecology

Farming Matters is published quarterly by ILEIA



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Cover photo

Mrs Thandi Mkhabela and her son Sandile at their family farm in Vikizijula, Swaziland.
Photo: Laura Eggens

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“As the family and the farm are linked and co-evolve, they combine not only economic functions, but a range of other ‘hidden’ functions, including environmental, reproductive, social and cultural functions. As a result, the motivations of family farmers often go far beyond profit maximisation”

Eve Crowley, Deputy Director for the Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division of FAO, in the article *With appropriate support family farming can contribute to the future of sustainable rural development*, July 19th, 2013

“AGRO-ECOLOGY SHARES FAMILY FARMERS’ EVOLVING KNOWLEDGE — AND SHOULD GO MAINSTREAM”

Fernando R. Funes-Monzote, Vice-President of the Latin American Scientific Society of Agroecology (SOCLA) and farmer in Cuba, in an article on www.scidev.net of October 16th, 2013

“TO PRODUCE FOOD FOR THE WORLD, FOR HUMANITY, IS ONE OF THE NOBLEST OCCUPATIONS. AN INTERNATIONAL YEAR DEDICATED TO FAMILY FARMERS PROFOUNDLY HONOURS OUR WORK”

Francisca Rodríguez, ANAMURI (National Association of Rural and Indigenous Women), Chile, in the FAO video ‘In preparation for the International Year of Family Farming’, September 11th, 2013

“A sustainable future can only be achieved if there is secure and equitable access to and control over land that protects the interests of the world’s family farmers”

Annalisa Mauro of the International Land Coalition, in a statement launched on November 22nd, 2013



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